



**Complete Transcript: HALO Talks with Doug Katona
Posted January 14, 2022**

Pete Moore:

This is your host, Pete Moore. And I am pleased and humbled to announce the launch of my one and only book, *Time To Win Again*, 52 takeaways from playing and watching team sports to ensure your business success.

Pete Moore:

Those of you who know me personally, and anyone who listens to halo talks for any length of time, know that I am an avid sports fan and a big believer in the value of team sports. What I've seen over the past 25 years, helping businesses grow raising capital, being an entrepreneur, myself, and coaching and mentoring executive in the sector. It's the lessons learned on the field perfectly apply to business entrepreneurs, executives, managers, you name it. Every company that's a strong company has got a good team. It's a quick read. There's awesome illustrations in there from our good friend, Mark Cruelty Free Cart Tunes. If you go to integrity.sq.com, enter your email address and we will send you information on the book and the entrepreneurs' survival kit as well. Be great. Take names, go halo.

Pete Moore:

This. This is Pete Moore on halo talks NYC on location, Dallas, Texas. Finally in person, my second meeting, we decided to tape it. I'm here with Doug Katona CEO, American barbell, Southern California called Southern California boy like myself now. And he's going to tell us about his progression into the halo sector and Southern know awesome things you guys are do in American barbell. So welcome to the show.

Doug Katona:

Thank you very much. It's kind of nice to be in Dallas with another SoCal guy. You got

Pete Moore:

It. Know we travel together now, man. We're like Southwest bandits.

Doug Katona:

So you're liking it though. You're liking SoCal.

Pete Moore:

You are New York. I got sunshine. Don't check what the weather is, you know, and I don't have to wear like you know, of like a wind windbreaker or jackets or anything. Well, when

Doug Katona:

We met in Manhattan for it was late in the day, so we decided not to have a coffee and, and you ordered Camile tea.

Pete Moore:

Yeah. Cause I'm, I was gearing up for my podcast, you know, I needed to get my, my throat, my chords ready for

Doug Katona:

This. Yeah. And I was, I was like, right. I like this guy already. Oh, wow. Yeah. I don't know

Pete Moore:

Mill don't I don't the meal you're I don't want to be like the came meal guy for you. You know what I mean? I want to be like the, you know, three cups of coffee, you know, hard charging who you are. Okay.

Doug Katona:

Fine. You are. But you're showing that that balance, you know, in your life, any, any man, that's not afraid to order cam meal at 2:00 PM is, is cool. Right.

Pete Moore:

I feel like balance is like me more like exposure. I'm like exposing, you know, who I am deep down inside. I'm very sensitive actually. So don't just be careful with me. <Laugh> very gentle. You have to, you know, I had some issues, but we're working through 'em so let's get back to what we were talking about. Oh yeah. Was nothing yet <laugh> so your background in the industry is.dot, dot

Doug Katona:

Madlibs. So, you know, remember that game. That was awesome. I just, I was just talking to the guy who really gave me my start. Robert Burns at shape of fitness center. Just ran into him minutes ago, just before this podcast. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> and guys 67 looks amazing. And we first start, we mean, I came out of USC, not really knowing what I wanted to do. Right. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so I remember graduating and, and driving home and thinking, yeah, what do I want to do? I've been an athlete all my life. Right. and I've always done things, kind of contrarian. I've always been a little bit against the grain. When I was at USC, I studied exercise science and movement and mechanics. And because I was an athlete, I always had, I don't know, know, kind an innate understanding of it. So I had no money. I graduated, came home to, to mission Viejo and told my parents I don't know what I want to do. I think, can I just crash on the couch for six months? Right. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And while I was doing that, I started, you know, poking around and figuring out what was going on and, and found Robert burn shape up in the center, Costa, Mexico, California. And we, we started personal training in Newport beach. Like we were the

Pete Moore:

First that's a good market to start personal training. I, I ventured to guess.

Doug Katona:

Yeah. I, I thought we didn't, you know, that, that was one of the few things we did in the beginning. That that was good. And then, and then I remember playing, you know, janitor, front desk guy, aerobic instructor, all that. But doesn't that like teach you

Pete Moore:

Like everything though, like when you start from that level and just like be

Doug Katona:

Able to see things. Yeah, man, it's being I still am blessed every day. I show so much gratitude every day that I had that start. Cuz it does gimme the context. Right. And, and you know, from there long story short is I, I kind of was, I always say for it chose me. I didn't choose it Uhhuh because I kind of just gravitated into being, you know, a, a coach, a leader, inspiring people, building teams. And we had a couple of gyms in SoCal and I wanted to continually be challenged and went to work for CrossFit HQ teaching, running mechanics. Okay. I was also working for Lee Steinberg and Warren moon. So the original Jerry McGuire, remember Jerry McGuire. Of course. Yeah. So that's what I worked for a while as an athletic training consultant. And did really well with that started lecturing a lot, all the idea conferences, authoring presenting, and just developed kind of a little bit of a reputation for teaching Olympic lifting in my mechanics.

Doug Katona:

And at the same time I was an athlete still. I was, I was competing as a category, two cyclist. Oh wow. But I was riding half the amount of miles everybody else was. And I would train in the afternoon, right. Strength training, deadlifting squatting, pressing, and everybody like you can't do that as a cyclist. Right. The it's helping me recover. It's making me stronger. And I had a great it for 10 years won two state championships. So that got me thinking, right. They got me thinking about there's more out there to talk about in the fitness industry. So long story short is COO for world gym international. After that developed something called world gym athletics, that was very successful. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> <affirmative> and it had always admired what Phil Patty had done at American barbell. And he and I just started talking and when COVID hit, I thought it was the right time to pivot become a partner in the company. And you know, we're just, we're stoked on what's happening. But honestly now I kind of want to give back and leave some legacy in the industry. I think the, I think the industry's ready for some leadership. Yep. Agreed. So,

Pete Moore:

So let's talk about American barbell because the thing that I find really intriguing is cuz I started back at Gold's gym and I've seen kind of the progression of like studio concepts and everything's kind of come back around to, Hey, I want to barbell, I want to do Olympic squats. You know, I think it's like the most selfie thing in the, in the gym is when people do Olympic squats and you know, you talk to anybody and they'll be like, look, you could walk, you could run on a treadmill. Like if you want to, you know, change your body, you got to, you got to lift. Like there's really no way around it.

Doug Katona:

I again, little contrary, but I always said, you know, the only way to get strong is to train hard, move fast. You got to lift load. You got to move load. You got to move quick. Right? I think one of the biggest problems that the industry faces is not addressing or acknowledging or not being bold enough to say that intensity and lifting heavy weight fast works mm-hmm <affirmative> and I think that's a really important point to drive home and the barbell. I mean, I, I love the fact when I, I was had a, a dinner with Les Wey the other night, one of the original StairMaster guys, we were talking about the old equipment, the cross aerobics machine. Some of you listening may remember that and probably laughing right now and scratching your head. How does he remember that one? But the barbell probably is the most functional piece of equipment you could own.

Doug Katona:

And, and I'm not saying that because it's Mar barbell, I'm saying you can squat press deadlift. There are so many, and, and you're working the major most groups that you should be working in and it's scalable, you can add load to it. So if you're going in the gym lift in the same amount of same way, all the time, you're putting out the inevitable, you're not going to be able to continue to progress. Right. Mm-Hmm so that's why, in my opinion in my experienced opinion is yeah, the barbell's the most functional piece of, and if you're going to have one, you might as well, you know get a nice one. Yeah.

Pete Moore:

So on that point there's a lot of products that you would deem in the world, you know, oh, that's a commodity, right. And you'd say, okay, the simplicity of the barbell is effectively, you know, on when you view it, you say, okay, that's, you know, I can get that into several different places as an analogy. There was, you know, yoga mat, you can get those anywhere. But then there was a guy who started up this company, you know, called Manduka who's a friend of mine and that became like the Maserati of like the, the yoga mat industry. So as you think about American barbell and, and buying the best one, how do you articulate that price to value proposition and you know, how do you kind of zone in on the, the, the results that you would get from that?

Doug Katona:

It's a tool and, or a weapon it's both. Yeah. It's also a dangerous piece of equip, like anything else, but look, if you're going to buy something that, and, and again, it's I say that we're a Ferrari a BMW price. We're not entry level. We're not going to build a cheap barbell. Keep in mind. We're one of the few that actually make our own stuff. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> so our barbells are assembled by hand in Las Vegas. So not too many people can say that. And they're assembled by hand. In fact, when you get a barbell that's built by us, whoever builds that barbell, they put a little tag on the barbell built by. Oh, sweet. Like by Mikey Alvara, who's our bar manager built by shout out to Mikey. Yeah. I mean, and Mikey's amazing. So we take great pride in that, right? The, the materials of the finest, you know, us steel, some of the finest materials that we harvest that off from specific, our founder, Phil Patty is magical at that. Yeah.

Pete Moore:

Do you feel, you know, obviously there was this 30 year trend to like outsource everything, right? Like our companies are saying like my earnings per share, here's like my cost of goods sold my gross margin. And everyone's focused on that. And then they realize, dude, I got to get this into a port. I got to get it into a distribution center. I don't know this thing. I have no idea what they put in it. And that kind of came home to roost over the last 18 months, whether it's the PPE or whether it's just the, the jammed

up supply chain right now. So we're going to make more things in America. We're going to build more things in America. Are people willing to pay for more things in America?

Doug Katona:

Not always. It depends. I think it depends on the pro. Now keep in mind, we do make some things in China. The difference is we own our own factory in China. They were trained by us. The mat,

Pete Moore:

Has Mikey been there? No. You know, I need

Doug Katona:

To send him out there. I

Pete Moore:

Got to take Mike, Mike, he really enjoy ticket to Shez end. He would, he

Doug Katona:

Would really enjoy that. So, you know, we're unique in the fact that we do have our own factory, meaning we make for other people in our factory. Yeah. I got you. So it, it, that's a little bit different and here's the thing. China does make some good product. Okay. people that say, oh, we got to bring everything back to America. It's got to be us made. I'm like, what kind of car are you driving? Who made the clothes on your back? Yeah. How about that phone you got in your hand? Right. So I,

Pete Moore:

I think, are you questioning me? Oh, you'd say in general. Not me. Oh, you remember? Yeah. Okay. China. China. Okay. Yeah.

Doug Katona:

So, so that's my belief. There is just that again, you have to care about that. So, so yeah,

Pete Moore:

It's a, I mean, it's an interesting balancing app because you got all these, this narrative of like made in America, buying America. And it's like, okay, I can't really do that anymore. Like we're in a global economy. And also, you know, you talk, you know, we're talking about balance. You can't just like pull billions of dollars of production out of a, out of a country, regardless whether they're buzzing Taiwan right now with their, you know, military arsenal. But you know, at some point you got to say, this makes sense. This doesn't make sense economically. And also from a value standpoint.

Doug Katona:

Well, I think a lot of people are thinking that now because of the supply chain challenges, right? They're saying, you know, a container that used to cost us \$4,000 to land is now costing 16 to \$18,000 to land, right? So you're, you're having to play a chess game with how you get stuff out of port in Asia now. And so I think a lot of people are looking at that, but again, for us, we're, we're going to maintain the integrity of our core competency, which is, you know, our series one dumbbell over a million pairs made nobody turns on it. And we we're, we care very much about our flagship product. And then the other

product that we choose to make in China is because doesn't matter if we made a it there or here, it's essentially the same product. It's just that we're saving the consumer some money.

Pete Moore:

I want to take a minute and tell our audience about two awesome workout recovery products I've been using for the last 18 months from higher dose.com leader in infrared technology for athletes like all of us, or we're an investor in the company. That's not why I'm telling you this. I'm telling you this because it works. You got an infrared sauna blanket. I hop in there, I'll listen to some podcast, burn 800 calories, get a mad detox and a P M F, which is a post electromagnetic field crystal mat that I lay on. And I recalibrate my cells to the normalize level, the earth. If you got somebody you like, and you're looking for a pretty awesome gift, they will love it. You could use this code halo 75, get \$75 off and you will not be disappointed higher dose.com, promo code halo 75. And now let's get back to our regularly scheduled program. So, you know, take a look at American barbell. What's the, when you got involved as the CEO, what, what's the breadth of products? And then did you kind of do any kind of analysis to say, look, here's like our 80 20 ruler. You know, here's where I want to take the product expansion. Or some people like in an outbreak going to be like, Hey look, sell burgers. I sell fries. I sell shakes and I drinks. And like, I crush that and I'm just going to continue

Doug Katona:

To crush this. We're going to continue to crush what we do well, which is barbell's dumbbells bumper place. Cuz we it's German urethane. We, we make UV. I mean the, the bumpers are beautiful. We know, keep in mind, we're OEM for a lot of the biggest brands and fitness. Okay. We do a lot of military work and that's how a lot of people kind of knew who we were. So when I came on board, it was more to pay homage to our, to Phil on what he had done over the industry. You know, he, he started with, gosh, you know, life fitness bought him and he was started high tech in the GP industries. But now this is a coming out party of the brand mm-hmm <affirmative> and what we're doing is, and we brought on some really key players in the industry. We brought on Hillis lake from Oleo. We brought on clay Whitaker from Preco had dinner with those guys last night and the invite,

Pete Moore:

What we did. Oh, sorry. I didn't

Doug Katona:

Were, I was busy as well. We just had margaritas and notch. I don't do that

Pete Moore:

Anyway. I didn't think you did. I only drank Chinese margaritas and cam mill

Doug Katona:

And came

Pete Moore:

Mill with a touch of caramel meal, a touch, a caramel know,

Doug Katona:

I, I think

Pete Moore:

Read my new nickname, call me camo next time

Doug Katona:

I see. I'm it. That's your stocking stuff. We get you a little, we, you know, I, I think the industry is, is what we're also trying to do is, is move the industry forward on we're introducing a training education component stuff I've been doing for a long time that we're now drawing under the banner of an American barbell. That in fact I'll announce it here. Ready? You ready? Go ahead. You're sitting down breaking news Wolf

Pete Moore:

Blitz a PDMO camo. We are

Doug Katona:

Theona. We are launching our own training education component with, with a twist that I'll explain is called natural NT, R L and we already have accredited courses on coaching and leader development, which I think is needed in our industry, but it's kind of a four quadrant approach of nutrition, training, recovery, and life. So we feel that the, the four quadrant approach to fitness is really important. If one of those things are out of balance. The other three, in other words, you could train really, really well, but if you eat like you don't sleep and you have bad relationships, those are things you're going to suffer. So that's kind of our big, so you're doing

Pete Moore:

That underneath American barbell. Yes.

Doug Katona:

As of yesterday, it's now trademarked.

Pete Moore:

Gotcha. Okay. Well I love acronyms, so I love this one too. You know, when you think about doing this with the NTL, you know, this is kind of like you and education and you're constantly, you know, telling people look this how, how you could run a better business, you kind of run your life better. How do you think about doing that under American barbell? And, and, and how does that inter intersect or do you say, Hey, look, if I get people smarter and I get people healthier, they're never going to buy more products. It's

Doug Katona:

Both the long game. That's a, a long game. Yeah. this is the legacy long game, both for Phil, myself. Got it. Hillis clay. We, we want to help the industry. I'm a participant in Rex round tables and, and I got to tell you that the guys that I'm with feel the same way. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> last time I checked, there's still only 20% of the popular that has a gym membership. That hasn't the needle hasn't moved much. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> even with virtual and technology and everything else. I think there's a totality approach to it. I think it's how you eat. You not working out training two different things. Mm-Hmm

<affirmative> recovery slash sleep and then life, how are you treating human beings? How are you, you know, your relation, all those things affect what you do. Right. And I think putting those things in, and we've been doing this for a while it's just now we've formalized it in with American barbell because we have, before I was on the world gym side, it was great, fantastic people, great franchise network, but I can only influence so many people. Sure. Well now we've got both sides of it and a lot more people to reach, right. We're, we're doing some work for the military and the coaching and leadership side now to help actually help them communicate how to get that content down to their coaches and the, and the people that are walking into their

Pete Moore:

Gyms. Right. Well, as a separate side conversation, if we can do anything in 2022 with you on halo academy, or have some kind of offshoot of this as, as you know, either an add on as a separate course, you know, we're, we're the whole thing with halo academy, which sounds like the same thing with NTL is not just to not just to have like, okay, I got a two week, you know, do some networking and I've learned a couple of, you know, tidbits about, you know, the business models of some of my competitors, but it's really the smarter you are. And the more curious you are, the better you're going to be in your, in, in your profession and in your life. And then everything kind of just takes off

Doug Katona:

From there. Well, haven't you learned that by doing halo. Yeah. I mean, it's been, it's been, wasn't that awesome. Was that part of the inspiration for you when you kind of put that together? Was that a

Pete Moore:

Yeah, I mean a couple different things. One is I didn't like the word wellness and I still don't. And even though it's this huge wellness movement, it's like the opposite of illness. And I'm going to talk to Dr. Cooper about this, but agree, you know, like the name, it's the wrong name. Agree. Right. So I did this because I want to change the narrative and I want to expand what we're doing here. So it shouldn't just be bricks and mortar and products, just like this should be connected fitness people here, there should be largest apparel companies should be here. Right. Supplements food better for you, you know, oat milk, you know, all this. I mean, it's, everybody's living a halo lifestyle. So let's get everyone who wants to be a part of that URL in the NTL that supports that <affirmative> and then we've got a much bigger group of participants.

Doug Katona:

I applaud you on that. Cause I think it's needed. I think, I think more people need inspiration to make better choices, to become better people. Yeah. And, and it's like taking care of yourself, but not yourself, one word yourself. Right. And so that's part of our approach on the lifestyle side. And then, and I think, you know, studies show that when people say working out, it has immediately a negative connotation, cortisol go up this proven study. Right. So we talk about yeah. Cause work, right? Why do you put work? We talk about training cause it's more of a long term approach. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> and we, we look at it on a weekly basis cuz life changes. So our programming reflects that for example, and we, again, I'm not going to be shy about the fact look, man, you got to train hard, move fast, lift heavy, sorry.

Doug Katona:

Otherwise life's going to get you. Right. And, and I think a lot of people live in this 20 or 25 year, window of their life. And that's where they're, you know, vitally functional have they have the energy, but what

about the other back end 30? Yeah. Right. What happens when you're past 45 years old, then what you know, I I'm, I surf, I still surf as often as possible. I can still squat with my butt down to the ground. I don't have injuries. I feel really, really good. So I, I think, you know, I've kind of all that experience that I've had training a coaching people in the industry. That's what I'm trying to bring with, with natural. Awesome. So yeah. Well,

Pete Moore:

Great. Look forward to it and thanks for breaking it on, on the podcast. We appreciate that, you know, so now we're going to get a lot more hits, wanted to save it for you, man. Well, eyeballs, a lot more downloads and we'll just benefit from it, you know, overcome a milk team.

Doug Katona:

No, Hey honestly, when you celebrate our

Pete Moore:

Wins together, buddy,

Doug Katona:

When, when we met that day, I'm like, and I was, I think we talked about it briefly and I, and I, I had had this on the works for a while and I thought, nah, I'm, I'm going to wait. I'm going to share it with Pete. Nice. I like that. I just going to share it with everybody. But yeah, everybody's going to see a lot more of it'll be on the it'll have its own side. It'll be on American barbell. And again, it's you know, we're going to charge really hard at it.

Pete Moore:

Awesome. So shifting gears, coming into a company, an established business, you obviously you are going to run a business the way you want to run a company. You know, when you get into a company and take this as an example, like what are like the top three things you look at and what are the top three things you've changed if at all at, at American bar. But obviously the NTL is, you know, obviously one of the three. So I just, you have two left

Doug Katona:

People before profits. I think building a stronger culture, which takes work. I don't think a lot of executives understand how much work that takes cuz you have to invest in the people. You have to listen a lot, ask them questions. What do they want? What are their dreams? What are their hopes and try to make that happen for 'em right. So I think one of the biggest things I did in the beginning was start to shift the culture a little bit internally. Right. Because we're a hard charging company. We wear a lot of different hats. It's 24 7 it's not nine to five. It's five to nine, right? Yeah. Yeah. And I love it. I still haven't woken up. It's like a hobby though. Right? It's like, you know, honestly, with, with the industry, I, it, I have a great secret. I, I feel like in the last 30 years I've been in, in the business, I still haven't woken up one day.

Doug Katona:

Not wanting to go to work. I still, I still honestly, and that's, you know, spiritually, I feel that way, but culture was probably the biggest shift. It spending time with people. And then again, my, my pledge is

people before profits and then usually profits follow. Yeah. Right. And then, and then, then the last is blocking and tackling to make sure that everything's cleaned up the way it should be and having vision strategy. When I came into the company, we didn't have a mission statement. We didn't have any core company values. And I put a committee together. It took us four months to put together core company values. And we talk about that. We have I hold a leadership meeting every Thursday at nine 30. We do not talk about business. It's my key people. And we talk about, gimme one update on personal, one thing that happened with you in business this week that caught you something, what are your challenges? And we just share with each other and that's probably done more for the productivity and profits of the company than almost anything else. Awesome.

Pete Moore:

So in closing here, give us a business quote that you love or something that you've keep on your wall or anything that you know, is kind of like your guiding light. So being

Doug Katona:

A, a former baseball player, an athlete my entire life there was a great a bull legged coach from Cal poly Pomona. And my first year before I went to USC, I played baseball at Chapman college. And I had heard about John Salinas for a long time walk out in the field, taking ground balls, these bull legged guy and his hat was kind of on crooked and gray hair, sticking out, probably a lot of, lot of hair sticking out of his ears too. <Laugh> and I mean he was talking to his players and, and they had been on a winning streak. I overheard him yelling in the dugout. He said, if what you did yesterday still looks big today. You haven't done much today and that's always resonated with me. So it doesn't matter how successful you are, stay humble every day, man, try to try to make a difference and then make truthful, truthful of appropriate, honest decisions and be authentic with people the way you are at work or the way you and I are right now is how I am when I go home to kiss my wife and kids, man.

Doug Katona:

So, and, and it's the reason. And I'll do one more quick, shout out to Eddie talk because I think what he's done with Rex I've sensed that I agree out to, Eddie's done great. It's just cool stuff. It's just such, and I think, you know, being here everybody's reconnected. And again, I, I think, you know, for me now, it's, it's hard charging to get the right people together in the industry to start to move the needle forward. And man, let's, let's inspire some people let's forget about all the other stuff that we got to face with technology and supply chain. Let's, let's focus on getting, yeah,

Pete Moore:

Got to think big and we need more people in the room that like you do and, and it's going to happen so great to have you on and look forward to seeing you in California. I'll see

Doug Katona:

You soon. All right, buddy.